No. 17

The
REDEMPTION
of
Marie Gordon
THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD
Price 10¢

She wanted to be where she could shine socially and eclipse, where she could make more conquests and triumph! Doubtful cabarets, fast company and questionable roadhouses she sought with new abandon.

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WHEN Philip Gordon finished speaking, the governess took a deep breath. It was so good to hear him express his sentiments with such frankness. It was good even to hear the sound of his voice. It was good to be near him, although she regarded the close proximity with increasing dread.

She was trying to frame some sort of a reply when he spoke again.

"I am so glad to see you on such excellent terms with my children," he declared, a note of gladness pervading his voice. "Indeed, it makes me very happy. And you are placing me under greater obligations to you from day to day. I am afraid I will never be able to thank you enough, dear Miss Desmond."

Marie lifted a hand to her glowing face. For the moment Phil's presence had robbed her of her composure.

"I am only doing my duty, sir," she murmured.

"You are doing more than your duty, my dear Miss Desmond," he insisted warmly.

She was trembling desperately because she was deathly afraid of betraying herself. And she discovered something in her former husband's eyes that gave her a shock.

"You—you remind me——" he began when little Phyllis clamored for his attention.

"Look, daddy," the child exclaimed. "Look at the pretty things I cut out."

With a smile Philip bent down and dutifully admired her handiwork.

Ah, how this sweet girl reminded him of her mother. Little did he dream that this mother stood within arms' length. Very tenderly he passed a hand over her soft, silken tresses.

Then he straightened up and went over to Harry.

"Well, my boy; how are you?" he inquired gently as he kissed him.

The lad leaned against his father's arm.

"I don't feel so bad, dad," he said manfully. "But I had an awful night. That nasty cough wouldn't let me sleep. Miss Desmond took me on her lap and then it got better. I slept a long time—oh, it must have been hours and hours, in your lap, didn't I, Miss Desmond?"

"What?" ejaculated Gordon, casting a swift glance at Marie who had retreated to the shaded window. "Did you hold that heavy boy on your lap for such a length of time?"

"Why not?" she answered, turning her scarlet face from Phil's inquiring gaze. "The poor boy was so miserable lying down. And I assure you it was not much trouble to hold him. He is such a loving chap and it was a pleasure to hold him until his cough subsided."

The statement was a frank one, but Gordon detected a strange note in the speaker's voice. He was staring at her now in amazement and admiration.

For a moment his gaze shifted to Harry. When he glanced again toward the window, he discovered that Miss Desmond had left the room. And she had not left a minute too soon.

Stirred by an emotion she was unable to control, she sought safety in flight. Her temples throbbed, her heart beat frantically.

It was utterly impossible for her to hold a confidential conversation with her former husband about little Harry's condition.

Alone in her own room, she struggled for calmness and breath.

"God help me!" she gasped, as she wiped the perspiration from her forehead. "I must not give myself away. But how can I remain in his presence without

feeling that strange, irresistible power urging me to throw off this mask and tell him who I am?"

She made no attempt to force back the tears. Somehow they helped her regain her composure.

Very quietly she went out into the hall, but she stopped at the door which led to the nursery. It was partly open, and she heard Phil's voice.

"I believe you are very fond of Miss Desmond, aren't you, my boy?" he was saying.

"Oh, I just love her, dad," the boy replied enthusiastically.

"And so do I?" little Phyllis chimed in, putting her arms around her father's neck. "The other day I said to her that she must be our mother, and then she began to cry. When I asked her why she was crying, she kissed me and said that I should always love my mother because she is in heaven."

Philip Gordon quickly released the child. He sprang up and measured the floor, keenly alive to the renewed pangs of his conscience.

There was a time when he had forbidden both of his children to speak of their mother. It had been an additional wrong against his innocent first wife. A feeling of bitter guilt was followed by greater remorse.

"Harry, you are old and sensible enough to understand what I am about to tell you," he said as he came to stop in front of the lad. "I want you to remember your dead mother every night in your prayer. She can not be with you, but she loves you quite as much from above as she did when she was with us.

"She was a good woman. She was an angel. Never permit anyone to speak ill of her. In the days to come, never listen to people who would say ugly things about your dead mother."

As he finished speaking he turned abruptly away.

It was plainly to be seen that he was in the grip of a powerful emotion.

The boy followed him with wide open eyes, a sudden flush dyeing his cheeks. Never before had his father spoken to him like this about his departed mother. It was little Phyllis, who had been an attentive listener, that spoke now.

"But I thought we must not speak about—about our mother," the girl exclaimed. "I heard that she ran away from us, and that she was wicked and bad——"

"Who told you that?" Gordon demanded, whirling upon the child. His face had darkened threateningly and his eyes gleamed angrily. "Who told you that, Phyllis?"

"Why, Nora told us," the little girl confessed close to tears. "But she was not the only one. Our new mamma said the same thing about our mother. She said that our dead mother did not deserve to be remembered by us any more."

Philip Gordon ground his teeth and his tall frame stiffened.

"Listen to me, both of you," he said, keeping his voice under control with a visible effort. "Do not allow your present mamma to say such horrid things about your dead mother. Your mother was an angel, and I know she is in heaven.

"Preserve her memory in your hearts and speak well of her at all times. No one shall ever prevent you from doing that. And the man or woman who dares speak ill of her, will have to answer to me."

Going over to Harry's dresser he picked up a framed picture.

"This is a splendid likeness of your departed mother, children," he went on, his voice quivering. "I am going to have it enlarged and have it hung in this

room so you may always see it. You see how beautiful she was, that gentle, loving mother of yours. And she was as good and sweet as she was beautiful."

Little Phyllis' big eyes were curiously fixed upon her father.

"Did you — did you love her very much, daddy?" she asked.

"Yes, I loved her," the father confessed. "Ah, I loved her dearly — dearly. And I revere her memory. But we all must do that, children. Your mother was the best and the truest woman that ever drew breath."

And Marie, playing the eavesdropper at the door, heard every word.

With both of her hands pressed against her heaving bosom, she swayed back and forth as if she had trouble keeping her upright position.

Once a smothered sound came from her lips. Then she glided back to her room and fell upon her knees in an agony of tears.

"Thank God!—Thank God!" she repeated over and over again. "Phil loves me still. Oh, Phil, my husband—my very own husband. Your heart still belongs to me. Alice may call you her husband, but you are that in name only."

With every ounce of her strength she fought to regain her composure. She dashed some cold water over her hot face, and gradually became calm.

By the time she reached the nursery there was nothing about her manner which betrayed the new-found joy which stormed in her heart.

Philip had left and she was glad of that. First she took the boy to her bosom and hugged and kissed him. Then little Phyllis became the object of her affection.

"Ah, we are going to have such wonderful times together, won't we?" she cried. "I only hope your daddy

will allow me to stay here with you."

"Indeed he will," exclaimed the boy. "He said so."

"Did he?" Marie smiled happily.

"Yes, he did," Phyllis seconded. "He told us that he would never let you go away. And we are both very glad, ain't we, Harry?"

The boy nodded his head solemnly.

The room was not big enough to hold Marie. The late afternoon sun was bathing the landscapes with golden glory. The fragrace of blooming flowers was being wafted through the open windows. The birds were singing as they never sang before.

"Now for a romp on the lawn," she cried. "Come both of you."

With shouts of glee the children followed their governess from the nursery. A few minutes later they were playing hide and seek among the shrubbery and trees.

There was no one to interfere with their pleasure The second Mrs. Gordon no longer concerned herself about her stepchildren.

Accompanied by her confidential maid, Nora Evans, she had gone for a drive. And she had left word with the cook not to wait dinner for her.

Chapter 54

THE DANGER LINE.

IT WAS nothing out of the ordinary for Alice to take long drives since her recovery. She followed her own inclination without consulting Phil. Society again was claiming her, and she sought pleasures not entirely conducive to her moral welfare. Inordinately vain as she was, she craved admiration from other men.

But she was rushing headlong into danger. She had become again the daring, reckless Alice of old.

That night after Marie had put the children to bed, she felt a strange restlessness. She did something she had never done since her return to Oak Manor, as Miss Desmond, the governess.

She strolled about the house, chatting with the servants. She walked about the grounds in the fast gathering darkness. On one of the benches under a towering tree sat Philip and his father-in-law smoking and engaged in an earnest conversation.

Marie did not see them, but they saw her.

"A remarkable woman," old John Procter declared, pointing to the slender receding figure.

"She is more than that," Phil rejoined heartily. "She is a real woman with the mother instinct. The way she takes care of those two children is touching. I wonder sometimes if she has passed through motherhood."

"Hardly, my boy," the other disagreed. "You know every woman who passes through that ordeal is marked for life. There isn't a line on Miss Desmond's face. And her figure is absolutely faultless. By jove,

what a wonderful wife she would make for some man."

Philip Gordon breathed a deep sigh. The old gentleman heard it and gave him a swift glance.

"Be careful, my boy," he warned. "Be careful."

"Don't you worry, dad," came back with a sad smile. "I am not likely to forget that I already have a wife."

"No, Alice won't let you forget that," John Procter said with a grin. "By the way, where is she now? I haven't seen her all the afternoon."

"Out driving and shopping, I suppose," Philip responded.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Don't you care?"

"What's the use, dad," Gordon replied with a shrug of his shoulders. "The man who can control her movements has not yet been born. I gave it up long ago. I have come to the conclusion that it is best to let her seek her own pleasure in her own way."

"And let her get herself into a mess," the old gentleman grumbled. "Don't forget she bears your name, Phil."

"So she does," the latter agreed ruefully. "But it would be useless to warn Alice. Society life is claiming her again. Against my objections she has renewed her membership with the Madison Country Club."

"What?" John Procter sat up straight. "You stood for that?"

"I had to stand for it, dad."

"Well, I am going to tell her something, believe me," the other growled angrily. "Alice is still my daughter and——"

"No, I wish you wouldn't," Gordon interrupted, laying a hand on his father-in-law's arm. "It is enough

that I occasionally quarrel with her . If you interfere it will only make matters worse. Please let her alone."

The old man gave his promise with evident reluctance, and Phil rose to take a stroll.

In the meantime Marie had returned to the house. She walked into the drawing room and paused at the piano. As she sat down her hands glided unconsciously over the keys. Ah, how long it had been since she had played.

Seized with an unrestrained longing to give expression to the emotions which swayed her heart and which she dared not clothe in words, she sat there with her head bowed.

Again she touched the keys. The first chord gave her a shock. And it was not an entirely unpleasant shock.

Suddenly her sweet, well-modulated voice rang out, timidly at first, then strong and clear in the opening strains of Balfe's immortal song from the opera "The Bohemian Girl."

She sang "The heart bowed down" because it had always been Philip's favorite song. Every word of the various verses expressed what she felt. They were:

The heart bowed down by weight of woe,
To weakest hopes will cling;
The thought and impulse while they flow,
That can no comfort bring.

With those exciting scenes will blend,
O'er pleasure's pathway thrown;
But memory is the only friend,
That grief can call its own.

The mind will, in its worst despair

To ponder over the past;
On memories of delight that were,
Too beautiful to last.

To long departed years extent,
Its visions with them flown;
For memory is the only friend,
That grief can call its own.

Philip Gordon was just then walking through the hall. Suddenly he stopped. He stood still as if spellbound and listened with rapt attention. Ah, that voice!

Was it not an hallucination, a fanciful deception practised on him by his senses? His head dropped lower as he listened, and a tear stole down his cheek.

Inexpressibly sweet that song sounded to him now, touching every chord of his heart. Under its magic spell he became oblivious of the unhappy present. Yes, that was the song his first wife used to sing.

"Marie — Marie!" the words left his lips in a whisper.

Again he saw her before him in all her delicate beauty; felt her luminous eyes resting on him in tender love, beckoning to him.

"My God, it is her voice!" he said hoarsely. "But —but it can't be!"

With two long strides he was at the door. Impetuously he jerked it wide open and entered.

"Marie!" The name came like the cry of an animal wounded nigh to death.

But the woman at the piano had heard it. With a half smothered exclamation she sprang to her feet. She faced him, pale and trembling.

"Mr. Gordon!" she gasped.

Her hands were clutching at the back of a chair for support. The look in her eyes was one of terror. They stood in strained silence for almost a full minute.

"Oh, it—it is you!" Gordon found his voice at last.

"Yes—yes," came trembling from her white lips.

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Desmond," Phil stammered with an apologetic bow. "I am afraid I have frightened you. I had no idea that you were in this room. You sang so beautifully, and your voice reminded me so much of one who was very dear to me that I forgot myself for the moment and rushed in here like a fool. Please forgive me."

Not another word came from the woman's tightly compressed lips. A deadly pang shot through her heart.

Marie knew well enough that she had sung Phil's favorite song, and by his obvious agitation she saw how tremendously it must have affected him.

Ah, why could she not rush into his arms and reveal the truth. He was still her beloved husband in the sight of heaven.

A spirit of hot rebellion took possession of her. Why not? Who was there to forbid it? Why not satisfy the longing of her soul?

And then the sure consequences—the disastrous consequences of such a mad act stared at her in all their ugly nakedness. She shook her head in the sudden self-denial that seized her.

"Go to him!" cried her tortured soul.

"No, you must not—you dare not!" cold reasoning answered.

She stood transfixed, her eyes wide, her mouth agape.

Poor Marie was being crucified and she was powerless to escape the ordeal. Several times her lips moved, but not an audible whisper escaped her lips. She was like

a statue hewn out of white marble.

At length she roused herself and passed a hand mechanically across her forehead.

The gesture utterly startled Philip Gordon. What a remarkable coincidence! It was the habit his first beloved wife had when excited.

There was something inexplicable, yes, almost uncanny in this extraordinary likeness between this shrinking woman and the one he believed dead.

But, he argued with himself during the tense silence, there could be no connection between the two.

While this Miss Desmond resembled his first wife in her mannerisms and voice, her face was that of a total stranger.

Gordon felt embarrassed. Miss Desmond must have experienced a similar emotion, for her nervousness became more pronounced.

"I—I was a brute to run in on you that way," he said, his usual calm self. "I am very sorry."

"You owe me no apology, Mr. Gordon," she replied with a smile that was half bitter, half sweet. "This is your house, and you are privileged to enter any room you chose. I am the one who ought to apologize for trespassing."

"Not at all," he hastened to rejoin. "I consider you as one of the family, my dear Miss Desmond. Whenever you feel like singing or playing, the piano is at your service, remember that."

"Thank you." Marie turned abruptly, hoping that this would end the painful interview. But it didn't.

"Since we are alone together," Gordon spoke again, "I would like to have you give me your candid opinion of my boy's health. I am rather worried about him because his coughing spells continue."

Marie faced him, taking a sharp breath.

"He is not progressing the way he ought to," she

admitted with a sad shake of her head. "The boy worries me a great deal."

"I have thought about engaging a specialist, Miss Desmond," he said, grave concern marked on his handsome features. "Something must be done to change Harry's condition. If we don't, he is apt to go into tuber——"

"No, not that!" Marie's hand was raised. "Please don't utter that word. I couldn't stand it."

Phil gave her a curious glance.

The look on her lovely face was one of frozen horror. Ah, how she must love his only boy. For a long moment he remained in thoughtful silence.

"I am going to telephone Dr. Van Buren," he said at length. "I want him to come the first thing in the morning and make a careful examination. Perhaps a change of climate will help. I have known of cases where such a change restored a patient to health."

"Yes, so have I," agreed the governess. She paused, then added with a note of entreaty in her voice: "If Dr. Van Buren comes to-morrow, may I be present at the examination."

Philip Gordon smiled.

"Why, certainly, Miss Desmond. It was my intention to ask you. By all means make it your business to be present."

Marie averted her face with a murmured: "Thank you," and Gordon thought he caught the sound of a suppressed sob. But no, his ears must have deceived him, for after bowing to him courteously, the governess withdrew from the room, somewhat hastily, but self-possessed and calm.

He followed her with musing eyes until the closing of the door shut out the vision.

"What a strange girl," he murmured with a shake

of his head. "What a very strange girl. The longer I know her, the more I feel myself drawn toward her."

Slowly he walked from the room. As he always did when deeply perplexed or worried, he sought the seclusion of the library.

Lighting a cigar, he sat down to think. Although he tried hard to draw his mind away from the lovely governess, he did not succeed. She filled his heart and soul to the exclusion of everything else.

Chapter 55

NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

IT HAS been said that a man's sins will find him out. The truth of this statement is illustrated almost every day. A criminal guilty of murder may escape punishment for a time, but he pays the penalty in the end. A man guilty of deliberately contributing to the delinquency of an innocent young girl is worse than a murderer.

The immortal Shakespeare said: "He who steals my purse steals trash, but he who robs me of my good name steals that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed."

The world knows that a young girl's good name once tarnished, will never regain its whiteness. If she makes a mistake which robs her of her purity, she takes the first step down the ladder.

Usually her neighbors and so-called friends will see to it that she does not climb back.

And the tragedy of it is that in some cases the man responsible for her moral degradation remains unpunished. Nor does he experience much remorse. The girl was just "foolish," and with that he dismisses the incident from his mind.

There are cases on record where a man of this sort was speedily punished. Irate fathers, brothers and sweethearts have resorted to what is called "the unwritten law", and avenged such a wrong.

While no man is justified in taking the law in his own hands, it must be admitted that in certain instances it is entirely excusable.

When Waterford Burley, the Detroit artist, met his tragic end in his studio, he merely paid the penalty an inexorable fate demanded. Because of his station and wealth he escaped the law.

When he led a pretty young Italian girl astray, he covered his tracks very well.

But like many others, he failed to reckon with the possible consequences. When Marcia Gardini became a mother, he saved himself by buying her absolute silence.

The girl's father swore by the Holy Virgin to avenge Marcia's dishonor. But neither coaxing nor threats could induce the girl to name her betrayer.

And perhaps it would never have been revealed if Waterford Burley and Carlton McLain had not both fallen desperately in love with Betty Harding.

This affair led directly up to the tragedy in which the Detroit artist lost his life, and incidentally received a just punishment.

McLain and Burley engaged in a bitter quarrel about Betty. McLain, in his anger, betrayed his best friend. He went straight to Antonio Gardini, the young Italian girl's father, and let the cat out of the bag.

What happened was told in former chapter. The hot-blooded Italian entered the artist's studio and killed him with a stiletto.

Betty Harding was found bending over the dead man's prostrate figure. A few feet away lay a dangerous looking paper knife. She was arrested and convicted of the crime.

That Betty Harding was absolutely innocent, need not be repeated here. Carlton McLain, with his rival out of the way, took it for granted that he had a clear track with the lovely Betty. But he met with disappointment.

Betty repulsed him, although acquiescing to his dishonorable proposal would save her from being con-

victed, and, perhaps be sent to the electric chair.

How the innocent young woman became afflicted with temporary insanity, and how she managed to escape from the institution in which she was confined, has already been told.

Every effort to find her remained fruitless. Her sudden disappearance was one of the most mysterious in police annals.

When months later, Antonio Gardini, conscience-stricken, went to the chief of police in Detroit and confessed to having murdered Waterford Burley, it did not cause much of a sensation. Of course, Betty Harding was thus declared innocent, and no more attempts were made to locate her.

However, the district attorney caused the following advertisement to be printed in the Detroit newspapers:

"If Betty Harding, present whereabouts unknown, will communicate with this office, she will learn something to her advantage. If you can not come in person, please write."

Most Chicago people are not in the habit of watching newspapers from another city. But among them was one who eagerly scanned those from Detroit.

This person was Alice Gordon, Betty's sister. She wrote a letter to the district attorney, explaining the relationship, and she was informed by return mail of the Italian's confession exonerating Betty.

That was the end of it so far as the Detroit authorities were concerned. But it was the beginning of something not entirely pleasant to Alice.

With pale features and obviously disturbed, she took Nora Evans into her confidence, and these two had their heads together for over an hour.

In the meantime conditions in the Gordon house-

hold remained unchanged with the exception of little Harry. His cough had grown more violent, and the boy's father, urged by the governess, decided to have Harry thoroughly examined.

As it happened, however, Dr. Van Buren was out of the city on a critical case. The latter's young assistant came, but he inspired Philip Gordon with little confidence.

The father finally concluded to await the return of his family physician who understood the boy's frail constitution.

Philip Gordon and his wife hardly ever met now, except at the table, and then only in the presence of Alice's father. John Procter had so far been restrained from delivering a well merited lecture to his daughter.

His attitude toward her was one of thinly veiled menace, and he treated her with scant consideration.

Alice sensed that the old gentleman was anything but amicably disposed toward her. She took no more notice of this than she did of her husband's chilling aloofness.

In her conduct toward Phil there was nothing left that spoke of love. He was studiously polite, but never again did he approach her with that winning smile, nor did he bestow upon her the least caress.

When he deliberately looked past her when they happened to meet about the house, she shrugged her shoulders and smiled viciously.

It was not Alice's nature to worry about the great change which had come over her husband. If he was tired of her, she did not care a great deal whether she remained Mrs. Philip Gordon or not.

As the sole heir to her father's fortune she could be independent. But in assuming this, Alice took rather much for granted.

For the present she was quite satisfied to get all the enjoyment out of life she possibly could.

Her head was too full with other matters; planning and scheming, yearning for the mad whirl and excitement of social life, for new conquests, homage and adulation.

Owing to Harry's alarming condition, Marie Desmond had requested permission to take her meals with the children.

This permission was readily granted her, and thus she escaped, at least, the almost unbearable ordeal of a daily intercourse with the woman who usurped her place.

She could not look at Alice without being reminded how she obhorred and detested her.

While Alice left her own sickly baby entirely to the care and mercy of Nora Evans, she held long conferences with dressmakers and milliners summoned from Chicago. Her extravagance knew no bounds.

The costliest creations of fashionable modistes filled her wardrobe, and never a thought did she give the man who had to pay these ruinous bills.

As a matter of fact it seemed to give her pleasure to spend his money as her insatiable vanity was carried to a point of madness.

Life at Oak Manor had become intolerable to her. She wanted to go back to Chicago to live, where she could be close to her fast friends found among the Madison Country Club membership.

She longed to be where a wider field was open to her—where she could display her expensive gowns, her coldly beautiful face and alluring personal charms.

She wanted to be where she could shine socially and eclipse, where she could make new conquests and triumph. Doubtful cabarets, fast company and question-

able roadhouses she sought with new abandon.

Three days later Dr. Van Buren arrived at Oak Manor. He had a long chat with Philip Gordon in the library, and then both went to the nursery

A pretty sight met their eyes upon entering.

Sitting upon a low chair close to Harry's bed was Marie, the governess, a fluffy Angora kitten on her lap, and with cries of delight and admiration the two children took turns in petting and stroking the contentedly purring feline.

Dr. Van Buren came to a sudden halt in the doorway, and a puzzled look came into his face.

"Wait a moment," he whispered to Philip Gordon. "Look at that young woman now. Doesn't she remind you of your first wife?"

Gordon turned a shade paler.

"I—I never thought of that," he answered so low that his voice could hardly be heard.

"But there is a great resemblance," the physician insisted. "While the face is totally different, this Miss Desmond has your former wife's figure, the same poise of the head and precisely the same mannerisms and walk. I have been noticing this ever since I came here to treat the boy."

Philip shook his head slowly. For a moment he stared at Marie's profile. No, it could not be. The beautiful young woman was an absolute stranger.

Before he could speak again, Miss Desmond discovered them standing at the door.

She quickly sprang up and dropped the kitten to the floor. Quite composed, and almost eagerly, she watched the two men advance.

"Dr. Van Buren has come at last," Gordon said a little anxiously. "He is going to give the boy a thorough examination, Miss Desmond."

"I—I am glad," she replied in a low tone.

"You better send Phyllis away," Phil suggested.

The little girl was placed in the care of Annie, who took her for a stroll through the grounds.

Marie's hands trembled so violently as she began undressing the boy, that Gordon came to her assistance. Once their hands touched, and she withdrew hers swiftlly as if she had come in contract with a live wire.

She felt vaguely conscious that he was looking at her, but she could not have met his eyes if her soul's salvation had depended upon it.

Dr. Van Buren proceeded with the examination in dead earnest and almost complete silence.

The only time he spoke was when he addressed a question now and then to the boy. The halting manner in which they were answered evidently worried the physician.

Gordon's gaze was fastened upon the little patient. Close to him stood Marie, her features ghastly white. What agonies she suffered neither Dr. Van Buren nor Phil suspected.

At last the doctor's task was done. He assisted in dressing the boy and then straightened up.

"What—what is it?" Marie gasped brokenly.

The physican did not seem inclined to pronounce the verdict and thus make known the true condition of the patient. He was pondering, his face an impenetrable mask.

"Is—is it serious?"

Again the mother heart spoke, for the moment forgetting that a physician never expresses his views in the presence of a patient.

The silence which followed now was heartrending. It was broken by the boy's father.

"Hadn't we better step into the next room?" he

suggested in a hoarse whisper.

Dr. Van Buren nodded.

"Please, Miss Desmond," Phil spoke again, then stepped over to the door and held it open to her. "I want you to come with us."

Marie inclined her head and with faltering steps preceded the two men. Her soul was consumed with the most terrible anxiety which threatened to rob her of her senses.

A mother's instinct told her that her darling boy's life was in grave danger.

"Well, what is your verdict, doctor?" Philip Gordon asked as they stood in the adjoining room behind closed doors.

"The boy is very delicate," replied Dr. Van Buren in a manner which indicated that he was loath to tell the true facts. "I am rather disappointed at his condition. There has been little improvement, and——"

"Doctor," the anxious father interrupted, "please don't be afraid to state the facts as they are. I want to know the absolute truth."

"Yes," Marie added, her voice low and tense, "tell us in all frankness what is the boy's condition."

Dr. Van Buren cleared his throat.

"I am sorry to say that the boy is in a very serious condition," the man of medicine replied, facing Gordon instead of the governess. "His lungs are badly affected, and he is also suffering from general debility. It is of utmost importance that he should have the most attentive and careful nursing. This is of really vital importance.

"And," he went on, reaching for his professional paper pad, "I shall prescribe a strengthening diet, with the object of increasing the power of resistance in his body. I should suggest a change in climate. Either Flor-

ida, the southern part of Texas, or California would suit.

"I am afraid, however, that the patient could not stand the journey in his present weakened condition. But as soon as he has gained sufficient strength, take him to some different climate."

What Philip Gordon suffered was not allowed to appear on the surface, for he held himself under perfect control. He remained quiete, his eyes shaded by drooping lids.

But Marie, forgetting everything except that her own beloved boy's life was in jeopardy, clutched at Dr. Van Buren's arm in a frantic appeal.

"Merciful God!" she sobbed hysterically. "You—you don't mean to tell us that there is no hope for the boy, do you, doctor? No, such a thing could not be possible."

"The boy's life is in God's hands, my dear Miss Desmond," he answered solemnly. "But it is a delicate blossom which a breath of cold air may destroy. Science can ony assist nature in overcoming disease, and where we have a naturally robust constitution as an ally, we may forestall the outcome with some degree of certainty.

"Ah, if we humble physicians could but keep those whom it is the almighty God's pleasure to take, what a miracle that would be. By that I do not mean that there is aboslutely no hope for the boy. But I would be a poor representative of my profession if I told you that his life is utterly doomed."

Marie either misinterpreted Dr. Van Buren's words, or she understood them too well.

Either way they expressed little hope. With an inarticulate cry she reeled backward. It could easily be seen that she was near fainting. And faint she did.

Gordon's timely interference kept her from falling to the floor. As she lay passively in his arms, he looked down upon the beautiful, grief-stricken face,

deeply concerned.

He became conscious of a strange feeling which stole over him. Ah, little he dreamed that this same woman had rested in his arms innumerable times.

Ah, if he only could have known that she was his beloved first wife for whom his heart was mourning and pining in vain.

Dr. Van Buren seemed to become excited. Philip Gordon did not know what to do with this lovely creature unconscious in his arms. These two men were staring helplessly at one another.

"Hold her for a moment, doctor," gasped Phil. "I'll call Annie."

By the time Annie arrived, Marie had regained consciousness. The physician was still holding her, and she hastily disengaged herself from his supporting arms.

"What—what happened?" she asked in a breath.

"Why, you fainted, Miss Desmond," Dr. Van Buren told her.

"Yes—yes, I must have." Marie forced a pitiful smile. "You see," she went on hurriedly, "I am subject to fainting spells. They come on sometimes when least expected. But—but I am alright now."

As she uttered the last sentence she stepped back and clutched at Annie's arm.

"You are not alright," the physician disagreed. "I believe that the exacting task of taking care of Mr. Gordon's two children is too much of a strain on you."

"Not at all, doctor," she assured him. "I am accustomed to great physical strain. Of course, your finding in the boy's condition upset me. I love him dearly. I could not bear the mere thought of — of losing him. That is why I fainted, I guess."

Just then little Harry's voice came plaintively from the nursery.

"Where is Miss Desmond?" it said. "I want Miss Desmond."

"You'll excuse me, won't you?" Marie murmured with a bow to Dr. Van Buren and Gordon. "The boy is calling me."

With that she passed from the room.

Chapter 56

RUTH GORDON.

PHILIP GORDON and Dr. Van Buren had been puzzled by Miss Desmond's sudden fainting spell. The woman's intense interest in the children puzzled them. Her strange resemblance in all, except her face, puzzled them. She was a living, breathing enigma which neither of these two men felt capable of solving.

They both had ample opportunity to study this governess at close range. They had seen her radiant smile and they had seen her in tears.

While they differed a little in their classification of her, on one thing at least they agreed most heartily.

Marie Desmond had that elusive something which, be the woman good or bad, makes her irrestible. For the want of a better word we call it "charm."

But at this particular occasion they did not discuss the governess at length. Little Harry's aggravated condition was the main and final topic of conversation.

It was definitely decided that the boy should be sent to Florida as soon as he regained sufficient strength to stand the trip.

When Dr. Van Buren took his departure, he left Gordon in a very much disturbed frame of mind.

With his head bowed until his chin nearly touched his breast he made his way to the library where behind closed and locked doors he could continue the mental battle without being interrupted.

Conditions in the household were intolerable. They could not remain as they were. Ah, what a frightful

mess he had made out of his own life and those of two so near and dear to him.

The members composing the family, including the servants, were divided into three groups. Philip Gordon, Alice and her father ate at one table.

Phil's young sister Ruth, with whom Alice refused to eat, took her meals with the governess and the two children.

The servants, led alternately by Nora Evans and Annie, had a dining room of their own. At this table frequent quarrels ensued. But what else could be expected? The master of the house and his wife set the example.

It has been said that a house which is divided against itself, can not stand. Gordon wondered how long he could stand the conditions in which he was forced to live without losing his mind.

And he wondered, too, how long his purse would stand the strain of his second wife's terrible extravagance.

His unhappy train of thought was rudely interrupted by the sound of an angry voice. It was a woman's voice—Alice's voice.

She was unloading angry vituperations upon someone in a manner that would have done credit to a very ordinary Irish cook.

"I am sick and tired of seeing you moping about the house, you lazy hussy!" she shrieked. "If you had an ounce of brains, you'd get out and find some work to do. You're no good!"

A murmured protest followed this outburst, then the mistress of the house broke out again.

What she said Phil was not able to hear. What he did hear, however, was the sound of someone receiving a smart slap in the face, and a low wail like that of pain.

With a bound he was at the door. Upon reaching the hall he caught a glimpse of his wife running up the stairs.

Turning to the drawing room he found his young sister lying face downward on a divan. Her shaking shoulders told that she was crying.

"Why, Ruth!" he exclaimed, hastening to her side. "What is the matter?"

The girl raised her tear-swollen features.

"Phil, please let me go away somewhere," she begged piteously. "I can't stand it any longer here."

"Why can't you?" he demanded crisply.

"Your—your wife, she hates me," the girl replied, dobbing her eyes with a handkerchief. "If you had heard what she called me you would not ask why I can't stand it. And—and she struck me. Oh, what did I ever do to her that she should treat me so mean."

Gordon's jaw snapped.

"What did she call you?" His voice was hard. When Ruth did not answer immediately he repeated the question fiercely.

"She called me a lunatic, a lazy hussy and—oh, I can't repeat that other word. It's too horrible." The girl hid her crimson face in her hands and started weeping anew.

"You need not repeat it, little sister," he said, suddenly becoming very gentle. "I can imagine. I suppose my wife enjoys reminding you of that affair you had with——"

"Yes," Ruth broke in. "But God knows I did no wrong. I loved Gerald, and he loved me. Oh, why did you not let us alone."

"You know why, Ruth," Gordon retorted. "In the first place you were entirely too young. And in the second place the man had no means. But I would have over-

looked that if he had been ambitious. He was lazy and worthless and I discovered a serious flaw in his character."

"I loved him for all that," the girl protested sorrowfully.

"You loved him far too well, dear," Phil said, his voice softening. "You idolized him and he was making a fool out of you."

"It is not true, Phil!" came back with some vehemence.

He laid a hand on her dark head and drew the hands from her face.

"Listen to me, sis. I had been my intention never to allude to this very unpleasant subject again. But I must since I realize that you are still under the impression that I wronged you. Gerald Simmons had boasted that he could marry you any time he wanted to.

"I know this to be a positive fact. That was not the worst, however. While you gave him your love, he had a disgraceful affair with another girl, whose name I won't mention. There was a child——"

Ruth's heartbreaking moan stopped him. And when she threw herself into his outstretched arms in a sudden tempest of weeping, he stroked her head and soothed her as he would a child.

Not until she had grown quiet did he speak again.

"Ruth, I wonder if it ever occurred to you what would have happened if I had not done what I did that night when I caught you with Simmons in Jackson Park," Phil began. "I saved you from a terrible fate. There never was the least doubt in my mind about that. I would a thousand times rather have seen you dead than dishonored."

The girl gave a slight shudder and snuggled closer to her big brother.

"A power greater than mine interfered," Gordon went on. "After the thrashing I gave the scoundrel, he ran, vowing vengeance. An hour later he lay stone dead at the city morgue. A reckless automobile driver probably saved me an unpleasant task, for my mind was made up to kill Simmons if he ever dared to come near you again.

"At the time you thought I was a cruel monster. You went into hysterics and your mind became clouded. God was good to you, for you are your old self again.

"I have told you the absolute truth about Gerald Simmons because I saw that you still cling to his memory. Forget that he ever lived, Ruth. That man was not worthy of you. When you gave him your affection it was like casting pearls upon a swine."

Very slowly the girl's hand stole upward and went about her brother's neck.

When she looked at him shyly a moment later, she seemed to have undergone a complete change.

"Philip," she said softly, "I have been trying to forget him. Now I can think of him only with contempt. You have opened my eyes. You know," she continued, brightening up perceptibly, "Miss Desmond has done a great deal to bring me to my senses.

"When I told her about my unhappy love affair, she told me that you did what was right. She is the best and truest friend you have on earth, Phil. She is more loyal to you than your present wife. Remember that, brother."

The latter glanced curiously at the speaker. Something in her face puzzled him. But he could not interpret the quaint humor in her eyes.

"I think a great deal of Miss Desmond," he declared. "God was good indeed when He sent her to us."

Continued in next number

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